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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [BU](#)
SUBJECT: MILITARY COOPERATION WITH BULGARIA: LEVERAGING OUR
ASSETS

Classified By: Ambassador Nancy McEldowney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The U.S. and Bulgarian militaries are now conducting the largest-ever bilateral exercises, with 900 U.S. and 300 Bulgarian soldiers, supplemented by joint Air Force training involving approximately 250 U.S. airmen and 12 F-16s. President Parvanov will attend the October 15 Distinguished Visitor Day, boosting what is already a positive public profile, in part owing to the injection of close to \$70 million in construction and operational contracts for the joint facilities. The Bulgarians are open to future larger exercises and participation by other NATO and regional partners. The U.S. Navy's ship visit tempo in Bulgaria's Black Sea ports is up considerably, offering another option for increased operational and political visibility. As we develop strategic policy options for SE Europe, the Caucasus/Caspian and Black Sea, there are assets and options here we can usefully leverage. End Summary.

JOINT EXERCISES -- BULGARIAN PANTHER

¶2. (SBU) Bulgaria joined NATO in 2004, concluded a Defense Cooperation Agreement in 2006 and signed Implementing Agreements in 2008. With some coaxing, Bulgaria has done everything we have asked in Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan, with the government often far ahead of public opinion. U.S. and Bulgarian land forces are currently in the midst of seven-week exercises (&Bulgarian Panther 20088)) the largest ever conducted in Bulgaria, with 900 U.S. and 300 Bulgarian troops. Designed to improve interoperability, especially under live-fire conditions, integrated units of U.S. and Bulgarian soldiers have field trained on convoy operations using tactics and procedures validated by NATO and Coalition forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. Later in October, 12 U.S. F-16s will arrive in Graf Ignatiev Air Base for joint training with Bulgarian counterparts. Although not integrated into the Land Forces exercises, this air training, combined with four U.S. ship visits since the start of September, expands U.S. engagement beyond the Novo Selo joint forward operating site and embraces the Bulgarian Air Force and Navy.

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

¶4. (C) President Parvanov has committed to participate in the October 15 DV day at Novo Selo, recognizing that Bulgarians need to see and hear Bulgarian leaders make the strategic case for Bulgaria in NATO and Bulgarian overseas deployments. PM Stanishev told the Ambassador that he is open to additional and larger exercises as envisioned under the Defense Cooperation Agreement and participation by other NATO or regional states in future exercises. While Moscow has grumbled about U.S. forces and exercises, falsely

claiming that they contravene CFE and are directed at Russia, the Bulgarians have swept that aside and continue to work with us on ramping up joint training. Meanwhile, after a concerted public diplomacy campaign, we see more positive media coverage. Announcement of nearly \$70 Million in U.S. Army contracts (Bulgarian firms won the lion's share of sub-contracts) for the temporary and permanent forward operating site at Novo Selo will inject economic vitality in the region. Humanitarian and community affairs projects garnered widespread praise, with positive stories highlighting human interest stories of U.S. service members. Coverage will further spike on Distinguished Visitor and Media Day on 15 October when over 35 local print and TV journalists descend on Novo Selo to witness the training, meet the local commanders and visit the site of a U.S. military humanitarian project. President Parvanov, USAREUR Commander General Ham, Tennessee National Guard Adjutant General Hargett (the State Partner for Bulgaria), military and Parliamentary leaders, as well as regional governors and more than 30 local mayors will participate.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS: PROPOSALS FOR 2009

15. (C) These successes create the political and operational terrain to expand and deepen our military engagement with Bulgaria. To pick up on Bulgaria's openness to an increased U.S. troop presence in Bulgaria and possibly inviting NATO and regional partners to join in future exercises, we can pursue the following initiatives. Some will require more time and coordination than others, but we are confident the political space exists to move them through the Bulgarian interagency:

- Increase the frequency of training events.
- Establish a larger, more regular troop presence (up to 2,500 as allowed under the Defense Cooperation Agreement, with the ability to surge an additional 2,500 for up to three months).
- Multilateralize training by inviting additional countries to participate. UK, German and Polish DATTs have already expressed interest; obviously this would have to be worked in capitals and Washington, but there is a promising start. As co-members of Joint Task Force) East, Romania is a natural partner. Georgia would be another option, with an important political symbolism.
- Integrate U.S. Naval, Air and Army exercises to provide Bulgarian forces the opportunity to participate alongside U.S. forces in joint training. This would help raise the profile of air and naval cooperation under JTF-E and improve the Bulgarian's ability to cooperate across service lines.
- Naval ops/training in the Black Sea present additional challenges given continuing divisions between NATO Allies, and the special circumstances of the Montreaux Convention, but even increased port calls and PASSEXes would find favor here.

16. (C) Comment: The long pre-planned Joint Task Force-East Distinguished Visitors Day on October 15 will further raise the U.S. profile, and the Russians will notice. Whatever the Russian response, we expect Bulgarian government support for expanding military cooperation with us and NATO to continue and intensify. To seize that opening, we will work with the Department, EUCOM, USAREUR, USAFE and NAVEUR to ensure we best leverage Joint Task Force) East, our joint training facilities, and Bulgarian ports.
McEldowney